

## On either side of a moat? Elite and mass attitudes towards right and wrong

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**Abstract.** This article develops a cognitive institutionalist account of mass and elite evaluations of political ethics, which is tested on a new dataset from the United Kingdom. The analysis explores the extent of contemporary disagreement among British political elites and those they represent by comparing responses to questions asked in a representative survey of the public with similar questions asked of incumbent MPs and parliamentary candidates. There are systematic differences between members of the public, candidates and MPs at both aggregate and individual levels – differences which can be accounted for with reference to the framing effects of Parliament as an institution. Candidates for parliamentary office display significantly more tolerance of ethically dubious behaviour than other members of the public. Within the elite category, elected MPs exhibit more permissive ethical standards than those candidates who are unsuccessful.

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Modern representative democracy is based on bonds of trust between citizens and those who rule them. Whether one subscribes to a trustee or a delegate model of representation, democratically accountable leaders are people whose behaviour generally meets with popular approval. Yet, all too often, elite behaviour falls short of public expectations as elected representatives engage in self-serving or otherwise morally questionable practices that violate popular norms of ethical behaviour. Previous research has established the existence of systematic differences in ethical attitudes between masses and elites (Jackson & Smith 1996; McAllister 2000; Atkinson & Bierling 2005), but no study to date has provided a satisfactory account of the causal mechanism behind these differences. This article seeks to explain the differences between mass and elite perceptions of ethical behaviour in terms of a theoretical account based on the framing effects of politics as an institutional practice – in particular, the framing effects of parliamentary processes and norms. This theory is tested on data drawn from mass and elite surveys that included questions designed specifically for this purpose.

The United Kingdom is a particularly appropriate context in which to explore mass-elite differences in ethical perceptions. In 2009, revelations about MPs' expense claims opened a window onto a murky corner of British parliamentary life and crystallised popular views about the ethical behaviour of elected representatives. Some MPs had been claiming for paid-off mortgages. Others had been 'flipping' their properties, re-designating houses as second homes and claiming allowances to renovate each in turn. Yet others had been claiming various questionable outgoings, ranging from the petty – items such as bath plugs and packets of biscuits – to the extravagant – including the purchase of a duck house and the cost of cleaning a moat. As the revelations mounted, so too did the public's outrage. There was anger that a few MPs appeared to be intentionally breaching the rules. There was anger at the rules and what they enabled MPs to claim. And there was anger that many MPs had seemingly lost sight of the basic principle that their allowances were there to enable them to perform their parliamentary duties. At a time of economic hardship, large sections of the public could be forgiven for thinking that politicians were living, if not on another planet, then at least on an island surrounded by a moat.

Such gaps are hugely important in a democratic context. In particular, if systematic differences emerge between what citizens and politicians expect, and will and will not tolerate, then politicians may behave in ways that offend many ordinary citizens, with obvious implications for levels of both 'specific' and 'diffuse' support (Easton 1965; Bowler & Karp 2004). As Ian McAllister (2000: 35) notes: 'If voters' expectations about the proper conduct of politicians are continually frustrated, then it has the potential to undermine public confidence in the democratic system as a whole.' Ultimately, of course, it is politicians' actual behaviour, rather than their attitudes, that matters most. But if we are to understand fully politicians' misconduct and their response to its occurrence – not to mention the public's responses to both – we must also explore the values and attitudes amongst members of both groups.

This article develops and tests a new theory of ethical evaluations that combines the insights from older studies that explore legislative-socialisation effects with more recent insights from cognitive theories of institutional framing. It draws on an original and unique British dataset to compare systematically attitudes to corruption across three distinct groups: incumbent MPs, candidates aspiring to political office and members of the public.

'Corruption' is an ambiguous concept but is one that confronts individuals with the starkest of ethical judgements about what is right and wrong. The essence of the argument can be summed up in Lord Acton's famous dictum that 'power tends to corrupt', though the argument developed here pertains to

a limited form of power only – the circumscribed power derived from legislative office – and a narrow understanding of the term ‘corruption’.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of previous work on corruption perceptions. The second section introduces the data employed in the analysis and establishes the existence in Britain of a gap in standards of public integrity between political elites and members of the public. The third section sketches a theory of institutional framing that accounts for this gap, and the fourth section tests this theory by means of multivariate analysis. A final section discusses the findings and concludes.

### **Elite and mass attitudes towards corruption**

Academic interest in differences between elite and mass attitudes towards corruption is hardly new. In a seminal edited volume, Heidenheimer (1970) drew on the interaction of mass and elite opinion to formulate three general categories of corruption: ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘grey’. Black corruption was behaviour that clear majorities among both the public and political elites deemed extremely improper and wished restricted. In liberal democracies, the obvious example would be plain old-fashioned bribery, which both groups would likely regard as being extremely corrupt. White corruption, in contrast, was behaviour generally tolerated by both groups, or understood as being only marginally unethical: a local councillor using his or her influence to have a parking ticket waived for a constituent could fall under this category (Peters & Welch 1978: 975). Between black and white was grey corruption – behaviour that elicited different responses from elites and citizens. A majority of one group might regard the behaviour as being extremely corrupt; a majority of the other might regard the behaviour as being marginally corrupt, or else be ambivalent about its significance.

One of the first attempts to compare politicians’ and voters’ perceptions of corruption was undertaken in New South Wales, Australia (Jackson & Smith 1996). Members of the public and the state parliament were presented with a number of hypothetical scenarios describing potentially unethical behaviour involving holders of public office. Their responses suggested that politicians and voters tended to rank the situations in a similar order of corruptness, but the two groups’ responses differed when a situation involved greater ethical ambiguity. Elites seemed to judge behaviour more subtly than citizens did, leading Jackson and Smith (1996: 33) to conclude that ‘for politicians, some scenarios are grey corruption; for voters, all are black’.

A later study, drawing on different Australian data, compared the importance that MPs and voters attached to eight principles of conduct promulgated by the federal parliament (McAllister 2000). This study found that members of the public placed 'more store' on all the principles than elites: larger proportions of voters consistently said that each principle was 'extremely important'. This study also found notable differences in responses among members of each group. For parliamentarians, exposure to both political parties and the legislative environment shaped beliefs, although these two influences pulled in opposite directions. Party socialisation tended to lower expectations about ethical conduct; institutional legislative socialisation tended to raise them (McAllister 2000: 35). Among voters, a commitment to liberal democratic values, the experience of tertiary education and a sense of political efficacy were all likely to raise expectations for high standards of conduct (McAllister 2000: 30–32).

A third study used Canadian data to explore whether or not greater regulation of public-sector conduct had resulted in a convergence between politicians' and voters' attitudes and expectations towards political ethics. In line with previous research, Atkinson and Bierling (2005: 1018) found that Canadian politicians tended to be less harsh than citizens in their judgement of potentially corrupt behaviour; they were more tolerant of most situations that suggested some violation of the public trust by those in public office, including conflicts of interest, patronage appointments and the accepting of gifts. Conversely, elites tended to be more likely to frown upon behaviour that breached formal and informal rules of the game, rules of which most citizens were unlikely to be aware. Only situations describing potentially unethical behaviour in politicians' private lives, such as a cabinet minister not telling the prime minister about seeing a psychiatrist, elicited similar patterns of responses in both groups (Atkinson & Bierling 2005: 1020). The same study also found that voters and politicians were 'worlds apart' in respect of their broader ethical values. The public exhibited a stronger preference for increasing levels of regulation – for example, requiring politicians to publish their tax returns. Politicians were generally opposed to indulging the voters' taste 'for heavy regulation of political ethics' (Atkinson & Bierling 2005: 1024).

It is not clear from these studies at what stage political elites came to diverge from other members of society in their views and general orientations, and through what mechanisms. Previous elite-mass comparisons have been unable to shed much light on this question, as they have not addressed inter-elite differences or distinguished between incumbent and aspiring office holders in their samples. The unique nature of our data allows us to address this problem and to investigate through which channels, at what point and for what reasons elites come to hold distinctive positions on public ethics.

## Minding the mass-elite gap in Britain

Our data come from two cross-sectional surveys: the 2005 British Representation Study (BRS), a survey of all major-party candidates, including incumbent MPs, conducted at the time of the 2005 general election;<sup>1</sup> and a representative survey of the British adult population conducted by YouGov in April 2009 as part of the British Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (BCCAP). Both survey instruments contained a number of identical hypothetical scenarios, adapted from Maureen Mancuso's 1995 study of British MPs (Mancuso 1995; see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> Each respondent was asked how corrupt they felt each scenario was. Their responses were recorded on a 7-point scale, where 1 represented 'corrupt' and 7 represented 'not corrupt'.

The use of hypothetical scenarios has featured in numerous studies of ethical reasoning (Beard & Horn 1975; Welch & Peters 1977; Peters & Welch 1978; Atkinson & Mancuso 1985; Mancuso 1995; Jackson & Smith 1996; Mancuso et al. 1999; Atkinson & Bierling 2005). The value of the method is that responses can be standardised for subsequent quantitative analysis, while the same scenarios can be used to identify any systematic differences in

Table 1. Hypothetical scenarios

Scenario	Description given to respondents
Campaign	A cabinet minister promises an appointed position in exchange for campaign contributions.
Contract	A cabinet minister uses his or her influence to obtain a contract for a firm in his or her constituency.
Gift	At Christmas, an MP accepts a crate of wine from an influential constituent.
Honour	A major company makes a substantial donation to the government party. Later, the chair of the company is given an honour.
Planning	A local councillor, while chair of the planning committee, authorises a planning permission for property owned by him or her.
Retainer	An MP is retained by a major company to arrange meetings and dinners in the House of Commons at which its executives can meet Parliamentarians.
School	An MP uses his or her position to get a friend or relative admitted to Oxford or Cambridge University, or some other prestigious institution.
Secretary	An MP hires a spouse or other family member to serve as his or her secretary.
Travel	An MP is issued a first-class airline ticket as part of a parliamentary delegation. He or she exchanges the ticket for an economy fare and pockets the difference.

responses among different groups. Thus one study examined how British MPs' ethical values had changed since the late 1980s (Allen 2008), and another compared the ethical values of British MPs and Indonesian legislators (Pelizzo & Ang 2008).

We must, of course, recognise that the choice of scenarios is likely to affect the findings. Ethical judgements evoke multiple considerations based on inconsistent values, and different scenarios will prompt different considerations. Factors endogenous to the scenarios are likely to affect whether certain acts are judged to be corrupt, and these factors may include the payoffs involved, the identity or role and number of the individuals affected and the respondent's more general perception of the situation (Frohlich & Oppenheimer 2000: 88). The amount of information contained in each scenario will thus affect which values are activated and how a respondent weighs those values in his or her mind (Alvarez & Brehm 2002: 58). Crucially for our purposes, respondents to both the mass and elite surveys were presented with the same information, making it possible to gauge genuine differences in their responses to the scenarios. We hypothesise, for example, that politicians as a class will be more tolerant of behaviour when actual illegality is not at issue. Among the nine scenarios, only 'planning' and 'campaign' describe behaviour which, under current law, is unambiguously illegal.

Exogenous factors – for instance, the contemporary news agenda or what people may have read in the morning's newspapers – may also affect responses to the scenarios (Zaller 1992). Ideally, we would have drawn on two surveys conducted simultaneously to ensure that both sets of respondents had been exposed to similar cues. For practical reasons, that was not possible. Yet, although there was a gap of four years between the two surveys, the issue of political misconduct was on the agenda during both periods of study. In the run-up to the 2005 election, when the BRS survey was administered, politicians at Westminster were almost certainly mindful of Conservative MP Jonathan Sayeed's suspension from the House of Commons for misconduct. In 2009, many citizens were aware of allegations made against Jacqui Smith, the then Home Secretary, and others in respect of parliamentary allowances (the survey was fielded before the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper began publishing all MPs' claims and turned the issue nuclear). Furthermore, it was entirely appropriate to conduct the elite survey ahead of the mass survey. The BRS survey was sent to the cohort of politicians that voters could choose among at the last general election, and the MPs in that study were those who would be judged by citizens in the BCCAP survey.

Table 2 reports responses to the various scenarios ranked by the percentage of all respondents – citizens, non-incumbent candidates and incumbent MPs – who agreed that the act described was corrupt, interpreted as a score of

*Table 2.* Percentage within each group saying each scenario is corrupt

	N	Total	Public	Candidates	MPs
Planning	1,996	96.2	95.7	97.0	97.8
Campaign	1,994	95.0	93.4	97.5	97.9
School	2,015	91.0	90.2	92.4	89.6
Travel	2,011	89.1	88.2	90.2	93.6
Honour	1,991	86.4	91.0	80.2	63.0
Contract	1,993	72.0	75.6	66.3	66.7
Retainer	1,926	70.8	71.8	70.0	57.4
Gift	1,978	46.1	52.2	36.6	34.8
Secretary	1,999	39.4	54.2	16.0	15.2

Note: The figures in this table are based on the weighted sample, which includes 1,388 members of the public, 696 candidates and 99 MPs.

1, 2 or 3 on the 7-point scale (Mancuso 1995). The first four scenarios – a chair of the council’s planning committee authorising planning permission for a property he or she owns, a cabinet minister promising an appointed position in exchange for campaign contributions, an MP helping to get a friend or relative admitted to Oxford or Cambridge, and an MP exchanging a first-class airline ticket for an economy fare and pocketing the difference – were all thought to be corrupt by similar majorities of the three groups. For each of these scenarios, about nine out of ten respondents among the public, among candidates and among MPs judged the behaviour to be corrupt. Indeed, for two of these scenarios – the school and planning scenarios – there was no statistically significant difference among the three groups’ responses.<sup>3</sup>

Gaps among the groups were more apparent on the next three scenarios: those referring to the chair of a company being given an honour, a minister using influence to benefit a firm in his or her constituency, and an MP being retained to arrange meetings and dinners in the House of Commons. In response to these three scenarios, large majorities of the public (91.0, 75.6 and 71.8 per cent, respectively) said the behaviour was corrupt, while much smaller proportions of candidates and MPs said the same. For two of these scenarios – the honour and retainer scenarios – there was also a considerable gap between candidates’ and MPs’ expressed attitudes. Incumbent MPs were much less likely than other candidates to describe as corrupt a party donor being honoured – a gap of nearly 18 percentage points – and an MP being retained to organise dinners – a gap of nine points.

The last two scenarios – an MP accepting a crate of wine at Christmas and an MP hiring a spouse or other family member as a secretary – were found to

be corrupt by fewer respondents within each group. Reverting to Heidenheimer's typology, these were the only two scenarios that could be described as grey corruption on the basis of public and elite opinion. For both the gift and secretary scenarios, small majorities of the public responded that the acts described were corrupt. Only small minorities of candidates and MPs agreed. Clearly, most candidates and MPs did not see anything untoward in an MP accepting a small gift from a constituent when there was no explicit reference to any *quid pro quo*. As for the secretary scenario, the employment of spouses and other relatives, though occasionally controversial, has long been common practice at Westminster. While some elites clearly disapprove of the practice, most do not regard it to be corrupt. Not so the public.

Taken together, the data in Table 2 provide clear evidence that, as in other countries, British politicians and citizens do differ in their responses to certain types of behaviour. In addition, the figures point to intriguing differences between incumbent MPs and those aspiring to office. What the figures do not do is explain what accounts for these differences. It is to this task that we now turn. The next section sketches a mid-range theory of the effects of political practice on the cognitive frames that politicians employ to evaluate given actions.

### **Accounting for the gap: A theoretical approach to ethical evaluations**

Scholars of institutional effects have long been aware that institutions socialise people into conceptions of what is appropriate and what is right (Meyer & Rowan 1977; March & Olsen 1984; Atkinson & Mancuso 1991). Political elites potentially could be socialised by several different institutions, the most prominent of which are the political party and the elected assembly.<sup>4</sup> Previous studies of party and legislative socialisation have established that these institutions shape the political attitudes and beliefs of their members (Mughan et al. 1997; Searing 1986; Seyd & Whiteley 1992; 2002; Whiteley et al. 1994, 2006). Work in this area can be extended to the sphere of ethical judgements by drawing on theories of cognitive models and cognitive framing.

Social and political psychologists have identified a range of cognitive devices that help individuals to make judgements. These devices include cognitive metaphors, models and frames that simplify the evaluative act (see, e.g., Chong & Druckman 2007; Lau & Schlesinger 2005; Monroe 2009; Nelson et al. 1997; Polletta & Ho 2006; Tversky & Kahneman 2000).<sup>5</sup> Some institutionalist studies have demonstrated how institutions serve as framing devices that structure the way actors evaluate situations (DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Ingram & Clay 2000; Meyer et al. 1994; Scharpf 1997; Scott 1994). The theoretical

account developed here derives inspiration from this approach and suggests that political institutions, or more accurately a close awareness of and involvement in institutional roles, practices and norms, frame individuals' understandings of given situations so as to alter the formation of ethical judgements by practising politicians. In particular, our cognitive framing model posits that performing key institutional roles in representative politics – specifically the role of MP – conditions people's ethical perceptions, and makes them both more prone to see 'shades of grey' in concrete situations in which politicians might find themselves, and more likely to be tolerant of certain actions that are condemned by large numbers of ordinary citizens. In essence, the practice of politics exercises a framing effect that predisposes political elites to evaluate ethical attitudes differently from other members of the public.

Two key institutions are most likely to frame the way in which individuals evaluate elite-level political conduct: parliaments and political parties. The first variant of our hypothesis for explaining the British elite-mass divide is thus that professional activity in the House of Commons shapes the ethical judgements of those who succeed in becoming members of that body because they are most susceptible to its framing influences. The framing may occur in a number of ways. Most obviously, MPs are exposed to institutional traditions or 'rules of the game' and develop a sense of 'the way things are done' (Crewe 1974: 28). Over time, they become integrated 'into a well-developed structure of roles' (Searing 1986: 342). Thus politicians gradually absorb prevailing institutional norms, including norms and values about right and wrong. As a study of American state legislators found, when it comes to political corruption, 'internal norms of the legislative system tend to homogenize individuals in their attitudes' (Welch & Peters 1977: 459). A tendency towards homogeneity does not, of course, lead to attitudinal uniformity. Individuals with different prior beliefs will respond differently to a parliamentary environment; there will always be differences in views and judgements. Nevertheless, as studies of British MPs suggest, professional socialisation leads to distinct legislative cultures (Chibnall & Saunders 1977; Mancuso 1995).

A number of features of British parliamentary practice are especially pertinent for their potential framing effects on MPs' ethical judgements. A core component of our theoretical account concerns the relationship between common parliamentary practices and the boundaries between public and private life. In modern democracies, the concept of corruption has come to be understood in terms of a strong public-private distinction (Warren 2004). The public sphere is a space where the public good is paramount and where each member of the polity is expected to have equal rights and equal influence. It is also a space that is meant to be protected from the forces of private interest that might potentially undermine the public good and

individual equality. Corrupt acts are often defined as such with reference to a breach in the public–private divide (see, e.g., Gardiner 2002; Philp 1997; Rose-Ackerman 1999). Institutions intended to ensure public integrity are often designed to insulate public practices from private goals, either by removing or making transparent potential conflicts of interest. Thus some legislative assemblies place restrictions on their members undertaking extra-parliamentary work. In Britain, MPs have always enjoyed considerable freedom to hold down second jobs, but they have long been expected to disclose relevant interests.

Whatever restrictions are in place, conflicts of interest are an unavoidable feature of political life (Williams 1985; Stark 2000). Public actors are also private individuals with their own interests, ambitions and networks. Moreover, politics often requires – or at least encourages – politicians to make use of their private resources in order to achieve their political ends. Not only do politicians need to raise money to fight election campaigns, but they must also evaluate legislative proposals, build coalitions, engage with constituents, and manage complicated lives involving multiple roles, multiple dwellings and unsocial hours. All these demands are more easily met by politicians who can rely on networks of private contacts; these demands are all ones that tend to blur the public–private distinction on which common conceptions of public integrity are grounded. Politicians will be more successful if they can raise money from friends outside politics, make friendships with other politicians, draw on knowledge gained outside politics to evaluate the bills before them, and rely on their family members to facilitate their constituency duties (if only to serve as gracious hosts and/or hostesses). Thus a paradox arises: a strong public–private distinction is necessary to maintain the theoretical purity of democratic politics, but the practice of politics demands that the boundary between public and private be blurred.

This paradox is especially acute in the British House of Commons, where relatively modern concerns about separating the public and the private run up against older traditions of representation (Birch 1964). Historically, the Commons was just as much a forum for representing sectional interests as it was for the representation of individual constituents and constituencies. Moreover, MPs were encouraged to maintain extra-parliamentary employment to keep them in touch with, and to promote the representation of, such interests.

The important point to bear in mind is that, whether by design or by accident, such institutional practices and norms are likely to affect greatly how individual MPs make ethical evaluations. In the specific instance of judging potential conflicts of interest, for example, MPs may be especially conscious of and sympathetic to the traditions of interest-representation that permeate life at Westminster.

Another distinct feature of British parliamentary practice may also frame how MPs judge conduct, especially their own behaviour. Parliament has long enjoyed constitutional privileges from judicial interference – each chamber exercises exclusive cognizance over its own procedures – and membership of it may frame MPs' perceptions of their legal or moral status in the political system. In turn, it may frame their judgements about MPs' behaviour. One scholar writing about ethical failures in leadership has distinguished between volitional failures, when individuals consciously decide to act improperly, and cognitive failures, when individuals actively believe themselves exempt from moral requirements (Price 2006: 12–27). Knowledge of the constitutional status of an MP could well frame how individuals perceive the moral requirements associated with office, and can, we posit, lead to the formation of views that represent 'cognitive failures' from the point of view of the population at large.

Ethical judgements might also be framed by knowledge of institutional regulatory structures. British MPs have been bound by their own code of conduct since 1996, while the Commons also administers formal induction schemes to make new MPs aware of the rules and their ethical responsibilities. Formal activities such as these could certainly shape an MP's awareness of what is and is not acceptable. But it is also possible that exposure to a rules-based environment may inculcate those elected to public office, including MPs, with a keener sense of the legality of certain behaviour. For this reason, the possibility that politicians may become slaves to rules has fuelled a wariness of institutional codes. Codes may encourage the view that what is not specifically prohibited is acceptable, whereas greater informality may encourage the norms of honour, reciprocity and collegiality that can be important in sustaining high standards of conduct (Atkinson & Mancuso 1985: 480).

More mundane demands of politics may also frame how MPs think and reason. Political processes usually require elites to take into account many different points of view and considerations when making decisions. As a result, politicians will almost inevitably be obliged to make more nuanced judgements than ordinary voters. Thus, a study of British, Israeli, New Zealand and American elites found them to be more generally tolerant than mass publics of differences as a result of their interaction with diversity, their experiences of being responsible for governing, the need for them to make compromises and their greater sense of personal control (Sullivan et al. 1993). For their part, '[p]oliticians see the public as naïve about the requirements of politics' (Atkinson & Bierling 2005: 1010).

Although the formal and informal aspects of politics may condition and influence ethical attitudes, those formal and informal aspects are likely to be shaped, at least in part, by politicians' collective and individual interests. In a number of studies, financial self-interest has been shown to have a strong

influence on politicians' decisions to run for office and their decisions to retire, as well as their voting records on ethics reforms (Rosenson 2007). In Britain, financial self-interest was almost certainly a factor in creating a permissive parliamentary culture in the 1980s and early 1990s that encouraged many MPs to work as consultants and advisers to firms, and which led to concerns that some MPs were hiring their services to the highest bidder (Hollingsworth 1991). More recently, many MPs' dissatisfaction with their wages almost certainly fostered a mindset in which official allowances and expenses were seen as a legitimate top-up for their pay.

Given their institutional location, MPs themselves are clearly most likely to be affected by the cognitive framing effects of Parliament. Yet Parliament is not the only institution that is likely to shape how MPs and others form ethical judgements; the institution of the political party is also a potential framing agent. A second variant of our cognitive framing hypothesis is thus that parties are key institutions for shaping the ethical attitudes of political elites. Almost every MP and aspiring MP will have been an active member of a political party, and all will have shared the experience of developing party strategy, campaigning, coming into contact with prospective constituents and having to make compromises in order to achieve desired outcomes. Party members, in other words, may come to think differently from other members of the public, and MPs may think differently from the public because they are already party members.

It is possible that other non-parliamentary political experience – for instance membership of a local council or another elected body – may shape individuals' ethical judgements. We do not discount this possibility – indeed we control for it in our analysis below – but we argue that experience of political parties is generally likely to have a far more powerful cognitive framing effect than any other extra- or pre-parliamentary political experience. After all, most politics in Britain is party politics, and most people's experience of politics will be mediated through membership of, knowledge of or interaction with political parties.

A further reason to focus on parties as the second variant of our framing model is that parties also represent distinct normative worlds and ideological traditions that, in the context of corruption, may adopt different understandings of the appropriate division between the public and private spheres. Previous studies have found that parties' traditions can shape the attitudes of the elites who are affiliated with them (Searing 1982; Atkinson & Mancuso 1985). Writing about Conservative MPs and their greater tolerance for conflicts of interest in the late 1980s, Mancuso (1993:185) suggested that contemporary Thatcherite ideals supported 'creativity in both private matters and public office'. Other studies, moreover, have shown how party activists' views are shaped by their involvement in party activities (Seyd & Whiteley 1992, 2002;

Whiteley et al. 1994, 2006). To the extent that there are any party-framing differences, we would expect those who have been most successful in internal party politics to have been most affected by the framing effects of parties.

To summarise, we expect political institutions to act as cognitive frames that shape and filter the considerations that politicians bring to bear on ethical dilemmas. There are two versions of this hypothesis, relating to the impact of Parliament and that of parties, but we would expect the effect of the two institutions to be similar in their effect.

Before we move on to test our hypotheses, it is necessary briefly to discuss a possible alternative explanation for the differences we have observed in mass and elite ethical evaluations – an explanation based on the logic of selection. According to this account, we might expect politics to attract and retain people with distinct ethical orientations; if this is true, self-selection may largely explain attitudinal differences between those who seek a career in politics and those who do not. The intuition behind the selection hypothesis is that politicians are already systematically different from most voters in terms of their ethical values and attitudes. These differences are likely to be the result of various pre-parliamentary experiences and processes. Previous research, for example, suggests that elite attitudes towards ethics are largely fixed from an early age, more so than, say, policy opinions or role orientations (Putnam 1976: 98). On this basis, it may be that political life selects individuals with distinctive values about right and wrong, either by tending to attract people with certain ethical orientations or by systematically filtering out certain personality types through established recruitment procedures. Political ambition, for example, is an obvious characteristic among most politicians but is perhaps not so common among ordinary voters. Needless to say, any predisposition associated with ambition, such as risk tolerance, will almost certainly be over-represented amongst MPs. Moreover, many aspects of an MP's job, including the long hours, the constant public scrutiny and the adversarial culture, are likely to be unappealing to most people; instead, those willing to engage with the cut and thrust of political life may feel more comfortable in ethically dubious situations and be prepared to judge behaviour more subtly.

At the same time, those drawn to a political career tend to come from sections of society with distinct approaches to ethical reasoning. Better educated and high-earning citizens are in general more likely to take into account the legality of a situation when judging ethical dilemmas, while less educated and poorer individuals are more likely to think in moralistic terms and to condemn behaviour that embodies blatant self-interest or runs contrary to community values (Johnston 1986, 1991; Redlawsk & McCann 2005). MPs are disproportionately drawn from among graduates and professionals. We would thus expect, all things being equal, politicians to think like them. They are

already more likely to have the ‘better cognitive skills [that] produce a greater awareness about the complexities of the political world, and the difficulties of making firm judgements about particular standards of conduct’ (McAllister 2000: 32).

The evidence presented in Table 2 provides little support for the selection hypothesis, however. There are wide differences in patterns across the questions, and it is clearly not the case that those who choose to enter politics are necessarily more tolerant of potentially corrupt behaviour. Indeed, in respect of the planning and campaign scenarios, elites were actually more likely to describe the behaviour as corrupt than other members of the population. Moreover, there are clear inter-elite differences, with MPs sometimes more and sometimes less tolerant of certain scenarios than aspiring candidates. The lack of uniformity leads us largely to discount the possibility that those who elect to enter politics differ systematically in their ethical predisposition from everyone else. Selection-related factors cannot be discounted altogether, but alternative factors are required fully to explain mass-elite differences.

In the next section, we test the different versions of the cognitive institutionalist approach developed here.

## Analysis

An initial test of these competing hypotheses is provided in Table 3, which reports the mean scores among each group in response to the different scenarios. As the mean score approaches one, the situation was considered more

*Table 3.* Mean scores in response to hypothetical scenarios: public and elites

	All	Public	Candidates	MPs
Planning	1.35	1.40***	1.27**	1.16***
Campaign	1.44	1.51***	1.34***	1.23**
Honour	1.99	1.75***	2.28***	3.10***
School	1.76	1.77	1.73	1.91
Travel	1.8	1.79	1.81	1.84
Contract	2.62	2.45***	2.94***	2.72
Retainer	2.76	2.68**	2.83	3.30**
Gift	3.77	3.55***	4.13***	4.10*
Secretary	4.23	3.55***	5.34***	5.56***
Scale	2.4	2.24***	2.62***	2.76***

Notes: \* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

corrupt. As the score approaches seven, respondents were generally more likely to describe the behaviour as not corrupt.

The table, based on a pooled dataset including respondents from the BCCAP and BRS surveys, compares each of three categories of respondent – the public, non-incumbent candidates and MPs – to all others. Significance levels indicate the results of comparison-of-means tests. For two of the scenarios – ‘planning’ and ‘campaign’ – there were significant differences between citizens and politicians. All groups clearly regarded the behaviour as being relatively corrupt, yet politicians tended to view the behaviour as being more corrupt. These differences may well be a consequence of the scenarios describing illegal behaviour. Local councillors are required to recuse themselves from planning decisions in which they have an interest, while promising an appointment in exchange for money is a straightforward bribe. Politicians are likely to be more familiar with such laws. Some may have been local councillors; all will have stood in an election. Their responses thus suggest that politicians are indeed perhaps more likely to be mindful of the legality of an action when forming an ethical judgement. For two of the other scenarios – ‘school’ and ‘travel’ – there were no significant differences between the mean scores of the three sorts of respondent. But for the remaining five scenarios, which described more or less explicit conflicts of interest, both categories of politician were significantly less likely than members of the public to describe the behaviour as corrupt. These results support our hypothesis that politicians as a class are more tolerant of ethically dubious behaviour when there is ambiguity.

The differences between the mean scores for candidates and MPs suggest that the views of different types of politician also differ. MPs were, on average, more tolerant than non-incumbent candidates on the honour, school, travel, retainer and secretary scenarios. Separate difference-of-means tests (not shown) indicate, however, that the only differences that were statistically significant between the two sets of elites were those for honour and retainer.

What might account for the relative tolerance shown to these two scenarios? In both cases, the answer may reflect the fact that they describe behaviour that is close to ‘normal politics’ at Westminster. Many MPs work as consultants to outside firms. Provided they register and declare their interests, and do not initiate proceedings to benefit directly their clients, they are free to do so. Likewise, both major parties have recommended honours for party donors. So long as there is no explicit link between a donation and honour, the practice is legal, however unsavoury. Neither scenario explicitly refers to illegal exchanges; it is quite possible that MPs, familiar with such practices, were more willing to give the benefit of the doubt.

The final line in Table 3 reports the means for an additive scale composed of responses to the nine different scenarios.<sup>6</sup> Following Mancuso (1995), we

use this scale as a measure of respondents' general tolerance of potentially unethical behaviour: a low score reflects a low tolerance and a high score a high tolerance. Together, these figures indicate significant differences among the three groups: on the whole, ordinary members of the public are least tolerant of ethically dubious behaviour by political elites, sitting MPs are most tolerant, and candidates who aspire to a seat in Parliament fall in between the other two groups. These results provide *prima facie* evidence in support of the hypotheses advanced above, which suggest that institutional framing effects should lead to a divergence between the views of political elites and the views of the mass public, and that the views of the holders of national elected office should diverge more than non-office holders.

The basic model suggested by Table 3, of gaps among the three main categories of respondent, assumes a degree of attitudinal conformity within these groups. Conformity does not mean uniformity, however. The real test of our hypotheses requires multivariate analysis, which enables us to tease out the impact of exposure to institutions from various other attributes and attitudes with which this may be associated. After all, our principal interest is in the importance of socialisation and cognitive framing effects and how they shape tolerance of ethically dubious behaviour by politicians. Specifically, we wish to test whether members of the public who are more deeply and seriously involved in politics develop higher levels of tolerance. Party identification is a form of cognitive political involvement, often acquired early in life, that can be anticipated to make respondents more sympathetic to certain members of the political elite, and thus perhaps more tolerant of questionable behaviour on their part (Atkinson & Bierling 2005: 1020). It also makes sense to test the somewhat different hypothesis that attentiveness to public affairs should have the same impact on ethical evaluations as more attentive members of the public are likely to be better acquainted with some of the difficult decisions politicians are forced to make, as well as the compromises that typically play a large role in public life. Relatedly, knowledge of political scandals, which represents a specific form of attentiveness, might be expected to be particularly closely associated with ethical judgements.

It is necessary also to control for other demographic and attitudinal factors that might be associated with ethical reasoning. As far as demographic variables are concerned, previous studies have often found age, gender, education and income to influence ordinary citizens' ethical evaluations (Jackson & Smith 1996; Mancuso et al. 1999; Pharr 1998; McAllister 2000; Aldrich & Kage 2003; Redlawsk & McCann 2005). On the basis of these findings, we would generally expect older respondents and women to have lower levels of ethical tolerance than men and the young. As discussed above, higher socio-economic

status – measured here by education and income – can be anticipated to make respondents more sympathetic to the ethical dilemmas faced by politicians.

We might also expect additional attitudinal variables to affect judgements of elite behaviour, including personal ethics, perceptions of politicians' behaviour, interpersonal trust, efficacy and ideological position. It stands to reason that those whose own personal ethics are more stringent might have higher expectations of their representatives.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned above, we might suppose that more right-wing positions on economic issues would be associated with tolerance of ethical practices that vary somewhat from public-service ideals.

The role of factors such as efficacy and interpersonal trust is more difficult to anticipate. On the one hand, those who are more trusting of others and more confident of elite responsiveness to popular pressure might be more willing to trust elites to act honourably even in ethically ambiguous situations. On the other hand, such characteristics might also be associated with higher expectations for politicians, against which ethically dubious behaviour might be judged more harshly. Previous research provides little guidance in this area, though one study did find external efficacy to be associated with support for higher ethical standards in Australia (McAllister 2000: 31).

Indicators for all these variables were derived from the April 2009 wave of the BCCAP (see the online appendix to this article for full details of variable construction). The additive scale reported in Table 3, which was created on the basis of responses to all nine scenarios, was employed as the dependent variable in an OLS regression model of ordinary citizens' ethical tolerance. This model is presented in the second column of Table 4.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the only significant political involvement variables are familiarity with scandals and efficacy. The more familiar respondents were with political scandals involving ethical violations, the less tolerant they were of ethically questionable behaviour. When it comes to political morals, familiarity evidently breeds contempt. The association between low tolerance and feelings of efficacy in the public sphere is in line with expectations.

As has been found in previous studies, older respondents were less tolerant than their younger counterparts, and higher income groups were less tolerant than the baseline category of those who earned less than £20,000 per annum (although the variable designating the highest income bracket falls just short of conventional levels of statistical significance). Gender and education were not significant in this model. As far as the attitudinal variables are concerned, only personal ethics were significant; those respondents whose personal ethical norms were looser were also more forgiving of politicians.<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to explaining how elites form ethical judgements, our hypotheses suggest again that active involvement in political institutions should play a large role. But among politicians, such involvement requires a

Table 4. OLS regressions on the Ethical Tolerance Scale

Variable	Mass model	Elite model	Pooled model
Political involvement			
Labour party identification	-0.017 (0.099)		
Conservative party identification	-0.021 (0.104)		
Liberal Democrat party identification	0.084 (0.124)		
Other party identification	-0.216 (0.118)		
Labour party member		0.048 (0.087)	
Conservative party member		0.413*** (0.116)	
Other (SNP/PC) member		-0.434* (0.189)	
Labour party orientation			0.050 (0.055)
Conservative party orientation			0.223*** (0.062)
Other party orientation			-0.088 (0.086)
Attentiveness to public affairs	0.034 (0.036)		
Scandal familiarity	-0.071** (0.029)		
Incumbent MP		0.304** (0.097)	0.667*** (0.151)
Non-incumbent candidate			0.133* (0.054)
Party experience		-0.026 (0.066)	
Experience of elected office		-0.040 (0.080)	
Constituency involvement		-0.010 (0.022)	
Reason for standing – support party		-0.052 (0.103)	
Reason for standing – serve country		-0.053 (0.111)	
Reason for standing – help people		0.047 (0.095)	
Demographics			
Age	-0.006** (0.002)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.012*** (0.002)
Sex – male	0.117 (0.066)	0.006 (0.077)	-0.158*** (0.046)
Education – age completed	0.025 (0.022)	-0.011 (0.011)	0.031 (0.016)
Income – middle	0.173* (0.078)	-0.027 (0.085)	0.113* (0.061)
Income – high	0.148 (0.082)	0.146 (0.101)	0.082 (0.061)
Attitudes			
Personal ethical tolerance	0.072*** (0.018)		
Interpersonal trust	0.023 (0.012)	0.002 (0.004)	0.025 (0.023)
Efficacy	0.052* (0.027)		
Ideology (tax-and-spend scale)	-0.003 (0.018)	-0.007 (0.021)	-0.014 (0.012)
Constant	1.920 (0.235)	3.340 (0.337)	2.845 (0.152)
N	689	457	1,384
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.086	0.159	0.106

Notes: \* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ . Entries are coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

more elaborate set of indicators. Following McAllister (2000), we distinguish among the potential cognitive framing effects of holding national legislative office, being an active member of a political party, having direct experience of holding another elected office and being involved with community activities. Data from the 2005 BRS provided a means of operationalising these distinctions. For the purposes of this analysis, a dummy variable designating previous or current experience of elected office at the local, regional (London, Scottish or Welsh), national or European Union levels was employed as a control for the potential impact of experience in another elected office. Previous or current experience of regional or national party office was used as a measure of party framing effects (too many respondents had held party office at local level for this to be a useful measure). The frequency of a respondents' participation in community events served as a control for constituency involvement.

We might also expect the reasons politicians gave for first standing for election to be linked to their ethical attitudes: those with more partisan motives might be more willing to tolerate minor abuses of office for political gain, whereas those whose reasons were more closely associated with the public good might be less likely to tolerate abuse. Our model controlled for this possibility. Finally, affiliation with particular parties can be anticipated to influence institutional norms held by elites, as has been found in previous research (Searing 1982, Atkinson & Mancuso 1985; Mancuso 1995). Dummy variables were thus included for the three most common reasons given by politicians for standing for election, as well as for the main parties (Liberal Democrat party affiliation served as a baseline for comparison).<sup>10</sup>

The elite model incorporates demographic and attitudinal variables similar to those included in the mass model, although the indicators were in some cases constructed on the basis of slightly different survey items, due to differences in the questions asked in the two polls. Specifically, it was not possible to include indicators for either personal ethics or efficacy.

The results of this model, presented in the third column of Table 4, yield some rather surprising findings. Of the political involvement variables, only incumbency and party affiliation prove significant. Sitting MPs and Conservatives (both in and out of the House of Commons) appear to be significantly more tolerant of ethically questionable behaviour, all else being equal. Just as Mancuso (1993, 1995) found when looking at the late 1980s, it appears that there is still something about the ideology of the modern Conservative Party – or some other shared characteristic of Tory politicians – that makes its MPs and prospective MPs more tolerant of ethical deviance than other political belief systems. Our data do not permit us to probe this phenomenon in any greater detail, but further research examining the link between party and ethical attitudes is clearly desirable. Finally, affiliation with a minor party (in

this case either the Scottish National Party or Plaid Cymru) is, by contrast, associated with lower levels of tolerance, echoing the findings of the mass model. It is noteworthy, however, that this variable is only weakly significant (as is the case in the mass model).

As in the mass model, younger respondents in the elite model are found to exhibit greater degrees of ethical flexibility. Interestingly, none of the attitudinal variables is significant in this model, although this could well be due in part to the fact that it was not possible to include variables such as personal ethics.

The final step in the analysis was to create a pooled dataset combining, where possible, relevant variables from the BCCAP and the BRS. The model constructed on the basis of the pooled dataset enables a direct test of differences in tolerance among the general public, non-incumbent candidates, and incumbent MPs while also controlling for other factors, including party orientation (membership or identification). Though the number of control variables in this model was restricted due to issues of data compatibility, it was possible to include the key demographic variables of age, gender, education and socio-economic status. The attitudinal variables included were inter-personal trust and ideology (position on the tax-and-spend scale).

The pooled model, presented in the final column of Table 4, confirms the importance of legislative incumbency in shaping ethical judgements. The dummy variable designating sitting MPs has by far the largest coefficient in the model; controlling for all other factors included, the ethical judgements of sitting MPs fall, on average, two-thirds of a point higher on the 1–7 tolerance scale than those of members of the public. What is perhaps most relevant from the point of view of our hypotheses is that non-incumbent candidates also give evidence of ethical reasoning that varies significantly from that of the population at large, but that once other variables are controlled for, the impact of candidacy on ethical judgements is only about a fifth as large as the impact of incumbency.

As in the previous models, Conservatives and younger respondents were more willing to tolerate the forms of behaviour outlined in the scenario questions. In this enlarged sample, gender proves significant as well; this evidence suggests that in the enlarged sample men are more likely than women to condemn ethically dubious behaviour.

## Discussion

Our findings thus support the general contention that membership of Parliament engenders in MPs an ‘insider’ perspective on ethical questions that is distinctly at odds with the perspective of those they represent. Controlling for

other personal, political and attitudinal characteristics, incumbent MPs were significantly less likely than non-incumbent parliamentary candidates or those they represent to describe as corrupt questionable behaviour involving Members of Parliament. Our findings also suggest that, in many respects, aspiring candidates also display divergent values from members of the public. It is difficult to ascertain on the basis of cross-sectional data whether selection or socialisation effects account for candidates' different orientations *vis-à-vis* the public's; only detailed time-series data could answer that question. But it is very unlikely that selection effects can explain the gap between candidates and incumbent MPs and, by implication, the gap between citizens and MPs. It thus appears that being an MP is the crucial factor in promoting a greater tolerance of some ethically dubious conduct since there is scant evidence that either holding an elected office in the party hierarchy or constituency activity outside of Parliament shapes MPs' responses. We also find little evidence of any systematic differences between the politically attentive and engaged public, on the one hand, and the non-attentive public, on the other.<sup>11</sup>

The data we draw on contain little information about MPs' parliamentary activities, making it difficult to assess which aspect of parliamentary life is responsible for the findings we observe. In addition to the factors we posit above – greater familiarity with traditions of parliamentary representation, the constitutional primacy of Parliament, the prevailing ethics culture and the demands of politics – another may well be MPs' familiarity with the practices described in some of the scenarios, practices, such as employing a spouse as a secretary, that have a functional utility at Westminster. There is a more obvious logic of appropriateness for those who know and understand the system. Yet another may be to do with MPs' own self-interest: it is they who stand to benefit materially and politically from greater moral 'flexibility'. MPs may find that flexibility valuable in terms of justifying their own behaviour; but they may also find it valuable when judging and perhaps justifying colleagues' behaviour. The Commons is a collegial environment in which MPs need to cooperate and work together. Some degree of flexibility almost certainly serves the function of sustaining camaraderie, both within and across parties. It may help MPs to give the benefit of the doubt to errant Members and perhaps, on occasion, to turn blind eyes. Newly elected MPs may well find that, in order to get on, they need to get along.<sup>12</sup>

It is also worth pausing to take stock and ask two crucial questions: how much does it actually matter if MPs and members of the public judge conduct differently; and what might be done about it if it does matter? In answer to the first question, although this article's findings suggest a gap between elected politicians and people in terms of their ethical judgements, it is worth bearing in mind that, in response to most of the scenarios, there was what might be

called ‘general ballpark agreement’. Still, there were some differences, and differences between politicians and the public over ethical judgements probably matter most when they concern particularly ambiguous behaviour, which ‘encompasses conduct that under certain conditions is a necessary or even desirable part of institutional duties’ (Thompson 1995: 7). It is easier for an individual to make a mistake in such circumstances and to act unacceptably in the public’s eye, and more individuals are likely to do so. Dennis Thompson (1995) has described wrongdoing of this nature as being symptomatic of ‘institutional corruption’. It occurs when acceptable and proper practices are taken to perverted conclusions, and are tolerated or unchallenged by an institution. The 2009 British parliamentary expenses scandal is a case in point. Many MPs needed to claim their expenses to enable them to be in London and their constituency, but the needs-based logic underpinning the system morphed into an entitlement-based logic, as many MPs saw the system as a way of topping up their below-par salaries. Needless to say, that perception was at variance with the views of the public.

The answer to the second question of what can be done to minimise any attitudinal gap – assuming that is desirable – is unclear. Our findings, admittedly based on limited data, do suggest a possible solution. MPs were more intolerant than both members of the public and candidates of the two scenarios that referred unambiguously to illegal behaviour. If exposure to the parliamentary environment causes MPs to make more nuanced judgements about ethically ambiguous behaviour, it may also cause them to shun illegal conduct. Thus, if politicians are more likely to take into account the legality of a situation when judging ethical dilemmas, the solution may be to codify popular expectations in the criminal law. The instant response to many scandals is often to pile on more rules and to regulate politicians more heavily; later, the institution of more rules is often decried for their costs (Mackenzie 2002). But the instant response may, perhaps, be the most effective response after all. If we want to limit the discretion we give to MPs and perhaps limit their scope for exercising expedient judgements, the solution may well be to insist on the codification of rules and explicit regulation.

Whether the public’s preferences should be the touchstone for MPs’ conduct in all circumstances, however, is a different matter. On the one hand, MPs represent the public, and behaviour that appears to be outside the bounds of popular acceptability can affect levels of political trust. On the other hand, the public may not always be right about what is proper conduct in public life. To offer just two examples, popular preferences about medical and legal ethics would not necessarily be expected to determine the ethical and moral codes of doctors and lawyers.<sup>13</sup> Their experience and specialist knowledge is usually accepted as justifying some degree of autonomy in the formulation and

protection of their ethical codes. Yet, politicians are not treated in the same way, even though it may be desirable on occasion to permit them latitude when forming ethical judgements. A certain amount of moral flexibility may, after all, be necessary to oil the political wheels.

Finally, further research could usefully extend our analysis to other contexts and in particular to non-Anglo-Saxon settings where almost no research of this type has been conducted. It would also be useful to incorporate a longitudinal element into the analysis in order to tap responsiveness to institutional reforms designed to regulate the ethical conduct of practicing politicians. In addition, the findings of this study have considerable implications for normative understandings of ethical regulation as they have pinpointed a dilemma faced in virtually all democratic settings: contemporary understandings of public integrity require the maintenance of a strong public–private divide that practical politics militates against.<sup>14</sup> Another way of putting this problem is that the institutions of representative democracy systematically warp the ethical standards of the very representatives on whose conduct the edifice of democracy rests. The normative aspect of this dilemma is a topic for another day, but this article has hopefully gone some way toward bringing it into relief.

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## Notes

1. The population for this study comprised all Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru candidates from parliamentary constituencies in mainland Britain (1,979). The achieved sample was 796 (40.22 per cent), of which 81 were sitting MPs. Of the MPs, a majority (80 per cent) were male, 29 per cent were under 50 years of age, and 13 per cent were older than 60. The average number of terms each

- had served in Parliament was 2.5. A total of 74 per cent of the non-incumbent candidate sample were male; 75 per cent of the candidates were under 50 and 5 per cent were over 50.
2. Some scenarios included in the BRS questionnaire were not included on the BCCAP questionnaire because they were considered to require in-depth knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Some might query the comparability of surveys conducted through different modes, but recent research has established that this is less of a problem than was previously believed (Sanders et al. 2007; Twyman 2008; Vavreck & Rivers 2008).
  3. On the basis of a cross-tabulation of the respondent type and a dummy variable for each of the scenarios, where the respondent either thought the scenario was corrupt or not corrupt. The  $\chi^2$  for the 'planning' crosstab was just 2.367, 2.723 for the 'school' crosstab and 2.787 for the 'travel' crosstab.  $\chi^2$  results for all the other scenarios were consistent with them being significant at the 0.05 level or lower: retainer, 4.870; secretary, 290.6; gift, 47.094; campaign, 17.371; contract, 20.007; honour, 66.482.
  4. Or, in the case of Britain's House of Lords: the appointed assembly.
  5. In a review of the literature on framing effects, Chong and Druckman (2007: 104) define framing as follows: 'Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.'
  6. A factor analysis of the nine scenarios revealed two dimensions underlying citizens' responses, and three dimensions underlying politicians' responses. Unfortunately, the explanatory power of the factor analysis was limited and the dimensions were very difficult to interpret from a theoretical point of view, so it was decided to construct a single scale.
  7. This supposition chimes also with the claim made by several scholars that citizen reasoning about the ethical behaviour of political elites is driven by ethical codes derived from everyday life (Johnston 1986: 373; Jackson & Smith 1996: 28).
  8. We acknowledge that the  $R^2$  in this model is somewhat low, but we note also that  $R^2$ 's of similar magnitude are common in studies of trust and regime-support variables.
  9. We experimented with the use of dummy variables designating geographical regions, but as none of these was significant, they were left out of the model reported here for ease of presentation.
  10. Were the sample larger, it might be possible to introduce controls for characteristics of sitting MPs, such as marginality, length of tenure in Parliament, or experience in different roles (committee memberships, cabinet posts, etc.). Unfortunately, the relatively small number of incumbents in the BRS sample precludes the reliable use of sub-categories of this sort. Models (not shown) including variables designating such sub-categories indicated neither that length of service increases ethical tolerance nor that marginality depresses it, though these findings should be treated with caution due to the small number of cases in each of the sub-categories designated by the relevant variables in these models. Due to the relatively limited number of sitting MPs in the sample (81), we decided against including such variables in the analysis reported here.
  11. It is noteworthy that in the Australian context, McAllister (2000) also found no support for the supposition that political participation by members of the public conditioned patterns of ethical reasoning.
  12. Searing (1982: 247) has used a similar argument to help account for value differences among MPs.

13. We are grateful to an anonymous referee who suggested this comparison.
14. Not all normative conceptualisations of corruption reply on the public–private distinction – for example, Mark Warren (2004) critiques the public–private distinction and instead develops a conception of corruption based on the principle of democratic inclusion.

## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

### Web appendix: Data sources and variable construction

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